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Craft in design education and its role in positioning of craftspeople and their community

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1. INTRODUCTION

The ever-evolving path of craft practice in India, has witnessed the discourse of craft practice from multi-layered standpoints (Coomaraswamy, 1909). Craft in Indian context is practiced as a socio-economic practice within a community ecosystem where the maker, buyer and user are not separated from each other, and there has been a mediator in the form of either a 'ruler', 'activist', 'social scientist', 'middleman', 'designer' or 'academician', (Coomaraswamy, 1909; McGowan, 2010; Pande, 2020; Pande, 2023). It is imperative to acknowledge the influence of the changing nature of the patronage in craft. Traditional craftspeople from the rural context have entered the economic mainstream through different linkages of patrons and institutions, with a narrative of their upliftment and bridging the gap between the contemporary urban and rural (McGowan, 2017; Vencatachellum, 2005). However, according to Laila Tyabji (2007) and Sinha (2017), the craft practitioners lack sufficient economic returns and social status; they carry the stigma of inferiority and backwardness.

Craft in India is a vast sector integral and interwoven into its culture. Thus when design as an activity was introduced as a modern profession in the 50s within institutes it was geared towards helping the craft sector (Balaram, 2009) and has been an integral part within design institutions as is evident through the inception of Shantiniketan in 1921, NID in 1961 and other national and private organizations established in subsequent years that incorporate crafts and craftspeople in design education within different capacities (Chatterjee, 2018; Balaram, 2005, 2009; Minder et al., 2022). Though, within education, documentation of craft practices or collaboration projects between artisans and students provides an excellent and enriching learning experience for the students, this collaboration may or may not always manifest in a similarly satisfying or valuable experience for the craftspeople (Tyabji, 2005; Khanna, 2005). Individuals from the craft community lack a creative voice and have been passive receivers of design (Chauhan, 2020; Scrase, 2003); they do not share equity in the privilege enjoyed by designers and the educated elite (Tyabji, 2005). However, in the UN's 2030 Agenda for SDG, the core concern is human rights,

equality and empowerment for all (Chatterjee, 2018; United Nations, Dept. of Economic and Social Affairs, n.d.). With this as the primary setting, the research seeks to study and understand the positioning of craftspeople and their community within design institutions and academia.

2. DEFINING THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

It is estimated that in India, millions of people possessing traditional skills and knowledge of vernacular techniques still make a living by producing handcrafted goods and related activities (Liebl, and Roy, 2003). Craft in India is driven by community practice and tradition, and craft knowledge is transferred through family structure and generational practice (Sinha, 2017; Balaram, 2005; Minder et al., 2022). Sennet mentions that craft practice is highly skill-based, where he defines skill as a 'trained practice' (Sennet, 2008); likewise, according to Donkin, craft practice is a gradual mastering of tradition (Donkin, 2001). Knowledge acquisition by craftspeople and their community is pinned around the theory of tacit knowledge transfer. However, throughout the discourse of craft practice in India, there has been influence and impact of patrons in positioning the crafts and the craftspeople (McGowan, 2010; Pande, 2020; Pande, 2023)

During pre-independence John Lockwood Kipling was pivotal in paternalizing crafts, and shaping the perception of how they were approached in the nationalist era before and after Indian independence (McGowan, 2017). According to McGowan, a significant gap exists between the artisans, who are often the subject of development, and craft development experts, who are typically the educated elite with authority, arguing that a huge power imbalance is observed between these experts and the artisans they collaborate with (McGowan, 2017). On the other hand, the Gandhi and Tagore legacy of craft revival, relevance and the subsequent inception of Shantiniketan was linked to a freedom struggle in which swadeshi and village industries were a central strategy (Chatterjee, 2018).

In the 1950s, the legacy of Kipling led to the creation of craft institutions, like the National Institute of Design in Ahmedabad in 1962, and many other government and private institutions over time (McGowan, 2017). The role of higher education was geared towards contributing to the country's social, cultural and economic development and working towards its sustainable growth (Eames and Eames, 1958). 'Craft' and 'Design' have many similarities as both encompass human needs, cultural- expressions, material exploration; above all they respond to individuals' creative urge to express their innermost aspirations (Thakkar & Shah, 2014). While craft documentation or craft collaboration projects with artisans and students become an excellent and enriching opportunity of

learning and exposure for the students, it is not always a satisfactory or benefiting experience for the craftspeople (Tyabji, 2005). The increased interconnectedness has brought the artisans closer to the urban educated practitioners but at a cost. Artisans rarely enjoy their creative voice and feel reduced to the producer/labour status (Chauhan, 2020). As a result, more craftspeople have been observed leaving their craft practices over the years. Skilled workers in isolated areas often struggle to make a basic living, leaving them with no option but to abandon their traditional crafts (Sinha, 2017.) Craftspeople, despite being custodians of the intangible cultural heritage and possessing immense wealth of traditional knowledge are mostly job seekers and not job providers (Chauhan, 2020). They do not share equity and privilege as their counterpart designers and design elite, leading to vertical hierarchy and power dynamics. Designers, however play a strategic role these days with heightened social responsibility (Papanek, 1982). Design interventions, though well-intentioned, often lead to the emergence of craft revivalists and cultural elite, shifting the focus away from the craft practitioners and makers to those leading the projects or the drivers of initiatives (Mamidipudi, 2018).

With this as the backdrop of the research context, existing scholarship revealed that no study maps knowledge, acquisition and practice of crafts by the traditional crafts people with knowledge, acquisition and practice of crafts by designers from academic institutions. Hence, the research aims to study and understand the positioning of the craftspeople and their community within design institutions and academia.

3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main research objectives of this study are as follows:

- RO1: To explore the relationship between craftspeople, their practice and the design institutions.
- RO2: To investigate and examine methods of traditional knowledge acquisition by craftspeople within crafts community
- RO3: To examine knowledge acquisition by designers within design institutes
- RO4: To examine and analyse the perspective of designers, institutions and artisans on academic collaboration

4. RESEARCH QUESTION

The research objectives listed above led to the following research questions:

RQ1

RQ1.1: What is the need for craft education in design Institutes?

RQ1.2: What are the methods of selecting craftspeople as resource persons?

RQ1.3: What is the amount of engagement in craft learning?

RO2

RQ2.1: What are the methods of learning adopted by craftspeople?

RQ2.2: What is the time frame of learning and the hierarchy involved?

RO3

RQ3.1: What are the methods of learning adopted by designers?

RQ3.2: What is the learning time frame and the hierarchy involved within design education?

RO4

RQ4.1: How can craftspeople be positioned as knowledge providers within an academic setting?

RQ4.2: What factors are associated with the positioning of the craftspeople

5. IMPORTANCE OF RESEACH TOPIC

Providing dignity and respect for artisans for their wisdom and acknowledging their contribution to the continuity of traditional knowledge systems is a long standing and ongoing debate within academia, design and craft practice (Chatterjee, 2018; Pande 2020, 2023; Minder et al., 2022). A detailed and systematic literature study, it was found that, through the discourse of the interconnectedness of rural craftspeople, the urban design fraternity and associated stakeholders, the social and economic status gap between the two has remained substantive (McGowan, 2017). A fundamental divide remains and continues in craft development between educated elites from cities and the artisans who are passive recipients of design knowledge ‘within craft education at NID and other design schools within the country (McGowan, 2017). Traditional craftspeople are labelled as not being innovative as they face challenges in understanding the contradictions between the old and the “viable, new” markets (Liebl and Roy 2004). However, though no fixed definition of creativity is standardised globally, creativity bears a few core characteristics: originality, imagination, intelligence, and individuality (Niu & Sternberg, 2002). The order in

which man developed and acquired new craft skills relates to how man himself evolved from hunter to settler, from villager to townsman (Lucie-Smith 1981).

Design education in India started as a formal programme within an institution setup in 1961 with the establishment of the National Institute of Design in Ahmedabad (Balaram, 2005; NID website). There was no design education in India before this. Tagore's Shantiniketan was established in 1921 as an experimental university, that encompassed crafts, art and design as 'kala', with no distinction from each other. It was inspired by the Bauhaus philosophy of education, (Balaram, 2005). Traditionally, craft is practiced through apprenticeship, where the skills and knowledge are passed on from generation to generation, either orally, through observation or without any explicit knowledge transfer, being tacit (Balaram, 2005; Pande, 2020; 2023). It is recognised as the top tier of skill acquisition within professional practice, and expertise is primarily sustained by tacit knowledge, which is mostly difficult to be explicit and articulate (Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 1986; Collins and Evans, 2009).

However, the migration of the craftspeople from their crafts reflects the growing impoverishment of artisans and unsustainability of their craft practice (Sinha, 2017). The UN's 2030 Agenda for sustainable development comprises seventeen goals that are seen as integrated and indivisible (United Nations, Dept. of Economic and Social Affairs; Chatterjee, 2018). They balance economic, social and environmental issues. At the core, it concerns human rights, equality and empowerment for all. Presently SDGs offer the necessary relevance and urgency to the vision of Tagore's institutions created over a century ago, where Artisanal wisdom and skill were central to the vision thus' reiterating and acknowledging that dignity fuels growth "Where the mind is free and head is held high" (Tagore, 1912; Chatterjee, 2018)

This research proposes to provide a systematic and detailed exploration of the relationship between craftspeople, their practice and the design institutions. It would investigate and examine methods of traditional knowledge acquisition by craftspeople within the crafts community, along with knowledge acquisition by designers within design institutes and the parity and positioning of each within academia. It would examine and analyse the narrative views and perspective of designers, institutions and artisans on academic collaboration. Thus, the research will make a significant contribution through mapping the traditional knowledge acquisition system of the craftspeople in context. The significance of the research lies in the need for equity and dignity of traditional craftspeople in their social and professional field of practice which is parallel to the designers in academia and practice. The research will fill a significant gap in establishing a structured mapping

of the two paradigms and also open possibilities for further comparative studies. The research outcomes will provide substantial contributions, which can be adopted by policy makers, government and non-government offices, NGOs working with the craft sector, academic Institutes, designers, independent researchers and even the craftspeople in the community. It will provide a scientific framework to position, recognize and engage craftspeople and designers at par in projects within both government and private institutions and organisations.

6. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review is based on the in-depth study of secondary data. It has been systematically conducted through a thematic analysis, with themes developed to address the research objectives. The literature review is done through books, journals, scholarly works, review papers, websites and transcripts of conferences and seminars.

India has a rich history spanning from Mohenjo-Daro to Mahatma; it has ministries of national planning and is the first post-colonial economy to incorporate handicrafts into national development to bring the craft culture to global attention, ,this notwithstanding Indian artisans and their crafts continue to be in crisis today (Chatterjee, 2014). During the period of Nationalism and freedom struggle, the contribution of Rabindranath Tagore and others from the Tagore family, became very crucial, in understanding, the idea of craft, art and design, their meanings and significance, and ways in which they were used as an agency to fight the struggle. Vishwa Bharati, Silpa Sadan and Sriniketan were established by Rabindranath as cultural and educational centers, and for both Gandhi and Tagore, craft revival and relevance were linked to the freedom struggle, where Swadeshi and Village industry were central strategies (Chatterjee, 2018). It was based on the idea of 'total education', where there was no distinction between art, craft and design, (Balaram, 2005). Until the 20th century, 'craft,' 'art,' and 'design' were not viewed as distinct fields with separate terms (Pande, 2020, 2023). The separation of crafts from art and design has been a phenomenon of the late 20th Century Western culture, whereby 'making objects' were different from 'having an idea' and 'creativity' was a mental attribute preceding and divorced from knowledge of making (Dormer 1997, as cited in Pande 2020). Thus, the grouping and classification of various genres as art, craft and design was a system understood by and benefiting the marketplace, galleries and governments which adhered to a tacitly agreed financial pecking order given by an established framework (Greenhalgh, 2002 as cited in Pande 2020; 2023). As a result

of this classification, since 1920, craft experienced intellectual isolation; they have been deprived the Prestige of high art on the one hand and its inadequacy of reproducibility, additionally rendering it unsuitable as product design (Pande 2020, 2023). Thus, craft 'straddled between an art and design economy' occupying an economic space where individual handmade objects were sold at mass production prices (Greenhalgh, 2002, as cited in Pande 2020, 2023).

Exhibition, their ideology, curations and patrons, have also played a crucial role in structuring the notions of craft objects and their taxonomy. The inclusion and exclusion of objects and their interpretation has left behind much impact in the viewership and perception of craft appreciation. These perceptions are embodied in our minds. A deep paternalism has been invested in craft development, leading to the idea of artisans as subjects of craft development and the craft development experts, who happened to be the educated elites, or who possess power. John Lockwood Kipling contributed to how people thought of craft in everyday life (McGowan, 2017). According to McGowan (2017), Kipling's ideology has not only shaped the era of the 1950s but, in many ways, the craft development in the present day.

Design education in India came much later- post independence. It was the recommendations of Charles and Ray Eames' via the India Report, that the first design institute, the National Institute of Design at Ahmedabad was the established in 1961. The ancient Indian education system was based on the *Gurukul* system, where a *Guru-shishya Parampara* (tradition*)* was practiced. The knowledge transfer from *Guru* (teacher) to *Shishya* (pupil). The Gurukul provided a comprehensive learning (Balaram, 2005). Based on Macaulay's foundation of basic Education, higher Education in India began to be influenced by the western models. India's oral tradition and religious mysticism was often interpreted as 'absence of rational thinking and scientific systems, which is far from the truth' (Balaram, 2005). Balaram adds that, historically India's traditional knowledge was extremely organized and meticulously articulated. Balaram draws a similarity of the *Gurukul* education practice and the crafts, where the skill and knowledge are passed on from generation to generation though apprenticeship, largely orally without any written text.

Post colonialism, Art and design were associated with Indian art schools under the Ministry of Education; however, craft was associated with commerce, which came under the Ministry of Culture (Jain, 2005). Craft has been depicted as a separate, self-contained entity (Greenhalgh, 2002). McGowan, (2017) reiterates that there remains a 'fundamental divide in crafts development between an educated elite from the cities and the artisans who are often the passive recipients of design knowledge' in association with craft education at NID. Laila Tyabji (2005) argues that craft

documentation or craft collaboration for innovation projects between artisans and students becomes an excellent and enriching opportunity and learning exposure for the students, but it is not always a satisfactory or beneficial experience for the craftspeople. It is often seen that the designers, students or visitors look into the collaboration with the prime intention of helping the craftsperson (Ghai, 2015). Where the traditional artisans collaborate with the designers, the popular practice is to direct work to traditional artisans, often referred to as design intervention (Ghai,2015). Design schools and designers co-work with traditional artisans to contribute to their growth in coping with the contemporary urban market need and taste, where craftspeople are made to believe that it's the educated English-speaking graduates who have the solution and insights, that the traditional craftspeople cannot contribute to (Tyabji, 2005). Therefore, some argue, that the artisans, the custodians of the intangible cultural heritage, rarely enjoy the position of creative practitioners and thus only work as gatekeepers of communal craft knowledge, heritage, and tradition (Chauhan, 2020). Contemporary craft development has elements in common with Kipling's perspective—appreciation, knowledge, investment, and a drive to discover new markets. However, a key reason to discuss Kipling is the persistent gap or tension between valuing these crafts and the top-down control over their direction. This power dynamic often prevents artists from stepping into entrepreneurial roles and leading within the craft industry themselves (McGowan, 2017).

Traditional Craft products emerged from a community driven domestic practice, primarily purchased for cultural or utilitarian purposes by the domestic markets (Sinha. 2017). This also brings in the context of the place of work of craftspeople, drawing parallels to the 'workspace' of artists and designers. Sennet (2008), describes the craftsperson's workplace as his home, where he ate, slept, raised children and family and also worked. However, Sennet (2008) calls this image as misleading. He defines a workshop as 'a productive space, where people deal face-to -face with issues of authority'. With this definition, he emphasises the aspect of authority and skill: 'skill as a source of legitimacy of command or the dignity of obedience'. The skill and knowledge of the master, allows him or her the liberty to command, following dignity to the apprentice or journeyman, who learns from the master. In the medieval guild, there were three tiers of hierarchy, the master, journeyman and the apprentice; where it would take 5-7 years to practice as an apprentice, another 5 to 10years to become a journeyman and then further to become a master, he would be required to demonstrate himself as worthy of taking the place of the master (Sennet, 2008). Coomaraswamy, (1909) categorizes the craftsmen in the Indian context in three ways, 'as

member of a village community; as a member of a guild of merchant craftsmen in a great city; or as the feudal servant of the king, or chieftain of a temple.' This also refers to understanding tacit knowledge, which is not exchanged through written text. Sennet uses the term 'embedding' to describe tacit knowledge, where embedding implies a process encompassing all skills: transferring all 'information and practices into tacit knowledge'. Sennet posits that, the soul of the 'workshop', is guided by the notions of 'religion', 'ritual', 'originality', 'authority and 'autonomy'. Today, the loss of traditional handcrafted techniques worldwide (Walker, 2018) goes along with distributed efforts to re-value them.

In India, the handicraft sector falls under the care and responsibility of the Ministry of Textiles, which plays a pivotal role in overseeing all aspects of crafts and textile arts. This ministry implements policies and extends developmental support through two key bodies: the Office of the Development Commissioner of Handlooms (DCHL) and the Office of the Development Commissioner of Handicrafts (DCH). The other government offices are, the 'State Handloom and Handicrafts' and the Weavers Service Centre (WSC). Each organization has their own set of duties, mission and development programmes. According to the DCH (Handicrafts), 'the sector has suffered due to its unorganized nature along with additional constraints like lack of education, capital, and poor exposure to new technology, absence of market intelligence and poor institutional framework'. To overcome these and similar constrains the DCH has laid down development schemes through structured written documentation. They aim to support the artisans, through cluster development, infrastructural improvement, modernization of the tools, machinery, process and product development & diversification, enabling the creation of strong brands, innovative designs as well as technical know-how for niche markets for the products manufactured by the clusters. Additionally, schemes provide support through upgradation/creation of infrastructural facilities coupled with market linkages, employment generation of Artisans and betterment of living standards of Artisans (NHDP, CHDP, 2022). Also, the Office of Development Commissioner (Handicrafts) confers Handicraft Awards *(Shilp Guru Award and National Award)* to the master craftsperson's to recognise their contribution to craft practice. It is based on detailed criteria listed for granting the same.

However, with much development and interconnectedness with artisans and designers, scholarly works and in-depth literature study reveals that these models may, at times alleviate the status of craftspeople. However, they make artisans dependent on these groups which disregard the artisans' creative voice and knowledge and reduce them merely to the status of a producer (Scrase, 2003).

The majority of talented artisans suffer from poverty, lack of access to social services, illiteracy, exploitation by middlemen, and extremely low social status (Liebl and Roy, 2007). In the Indian context, illiteracy among craftspeople has consistently posed a primary challenge to the advancement of craft communities and their traditional skills (Sinha, 2017). The disappearance of traditional crafts and artisans has become a global phenomenon, as reported by BBC and CNN (Alleyne, 2020; Gorvett, 2021; Jianan Hu, Eunsuk Hur & Briony Thomas, 2023). The migration of craftspeople away from their craft practice highlights growing impoverishment within these communities, with the hierarchical, top-down structure of the crafts industry mainly rooted in the artisans' widespread illiteracy, indicates the need for a bottom-up approach to empower and elevate their social status (Sinha, 2017). There is a significant gap in mapping the traditional knowledge system of the craftspeople to provide, equity, value and dignity in their positioning.

The literature review thus revealed the following emerging themes allowing the categorisation of scholarship for ease of reference.

1. The Discourse of craft: In the era of pre-and post-Independence
2. Role of Patrons in defining craft and positioning the craftspeople
3. Institution building and their role in shaping crafts and the craftspeople
4. Collaboration of craftspeople and design institutions and its impact
5. The paradigms of knowledge acquisition: In traditional crafts community and within Design Institutions
6. Role of Government bodies in the crafts sector

7. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The universe of craft practices in India is vast, complex and diverse with a multitude of problems (Chatterjee, 2014; Meesala, 2017); selecting a large sample size within a limited time frame can pose a challenge to the research. Therefore, the researcher proposes to critically select participants from the craft sector, craftspeople, institutions, and offices that address and respond to the research objectives and questions. The sample selection will be purposeful, and the data collection proposed will largely rely on direct interaction with traditional artisans through semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions. As the respondents' information may rely on personal view points, experience and subjectivity, the analysis proposes to use a qualitative, interpretative, and narrative analysis.

Sample Selection: A purposive method was adopted and the research is primarily situated in Gujarat

1. The research is delimited to selected crafts of Gujarat only
2. The research is delimited to selected Academic Institutes of Gujarat only
3. The research is delimited to selected Government and Non-government offices associated with the Craft sectors of Gujarat only

The literature review allowed to identify the gaps in theory, practice and reality and therefore an appropriate research methodology for conducting the study has been chosen.

The research will adopt qualitative and quantitative research design methods to provide an in-depth understanding of the intangible aspects of study, along with measurable insights. The data collection will consist of both primary and secondary data collection methods. Primary data will be collected largely through interviews, quasi-ethnography and participant observation, while secondary data will be collected by systematically reviewing and analysing literature from books, journals, scholarly works, websites, institutional documents. "Our experience of the world arises from multiple, socially constructed realities" (Gibbs 2010:7). So, the research methods will adopt social constructionist framework and interpretivist approaches to analyse the data (Sinha, 2017).

Sampling Strategy: A purposive sampling method will be adopted to accommodate the intent of the research objectives, keeping in mind the limitations of time and scale.

Data Collection Methods: This research is qualitative in nature therefore, it will adopt distinct data collection methods based on the following objectives:

7.1 Objective 1: To explore the relationship between craftspeople, their practice and the design institutions, the researcher will collect data by conducting

1. In-depth and focused group Interview of participants, using semi-structured questionnaires, observations, and conversations
2. Case Studies of institutions, curricula, project reports involving craftspeople, engagement details and three to five cases of collaborative engagement of craftspeople and design institutions to study the nature and pattern of engagement and criteria adopted by the institutes in selection of the craftspeople to be empanelled.

7.2 Objective 2: To investigate and examine methods of traditional knowledge acquisition by craftspeople within crafts community. Data collection will be through

1. Quasi-ethnographic Fieldwork and Participant Observation within selected craft communities (purposive sampling for selection)
2. Semi-structured interviews in person, focused group discussion with craftspeople and community.
3. Case study: Three to four case studies of selected craftspeople or community (purposive selection)

7.3 Objective 3: To examine knowledge acquisition by designers/design students within design institutes data collection will adopt the following methods

1. Purposive Sampling Selection of participants, will be limited to students and faculty members of design schools.
2. In-depth, structured Interviews with design students and faculty

7.4 Objective 4: To examine and analyse the narrative views and perspective of designers, institutions and artisans on academic collaboration, sampling and data collection techniques will include

1. Purposive Sampling and data collection will be done through interviews within focused groups.
2. Survey and Likert Scale Questionnaires: These questionnaires will provide quantitative information on attitudes towards inclusivity, satisfaction with collaboration outcomes, and perceived respect and dignity.

8. ANALYSIS OF INFORMATION

The researcher proposes to analyse the data collected using a mixed-method approach. This will include combining techniques relying on qualitative, interpretative, sentiment and narrative analysis and narrative analysis while being mindful that subjectivity and bias do not influence the outcomes.

9. LIMITATIONS AND KEY ASSUMPTIONS

All research inevitably has limitations, and even the most significant breakthroughs are unlikely to be devoid of them (Ioannidis, 2007:324). Utmost care has been taken to eliminate any bias or errors, and the research proposes to be grounded through an in-depth literature review. All the decisions and choices made will strive to be neutral and informed by knowledge gained through

existing scholarship supported by fieldwork. However, this research is not without its limitations.

1. Due to vast number and diversity of crafts prevailing in the country, not all craft practices and practitioners have been covered. Selection was limited to certain crafts within the Gujarat region.
2. Due to the vast number of design schools and faculty in the country, all have not been covered; Selection was limited to selected schools within the region of Gujarat.
3. Given the time bound nature of the research, the scholar selected participants based on criteria such as location, accessibility, availability and participant agreeability.

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